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ROGUE NOTES

Editorial

7

TOURIST ATTRACTION

By Robert Sheckley

8

BOOK BONUS—NO STAIN SO DEEP

By Chester S. Geier

11

THE GIRLS WITH GOLD-PLATED BRAINS

By Franklin Thistle

14

SEARCH FOR A PARADISE

By Mack Reynolds

20

IN FROM ROCHESTER

By Philip Kalfus

24

ROGUE'S GALLERY

Pictorial

27

NERTSERY RHYMES

Feature

32

ROGUE OF DISTINCTION—VICTOR MATURE

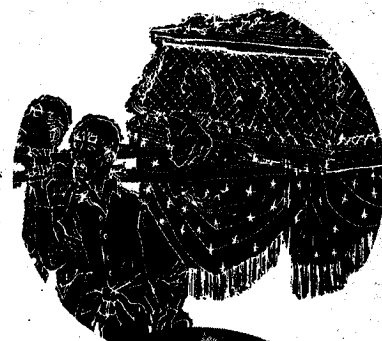
No. 18 of a series

34

TALENT SCOUT

By Jack Ritchie

36



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TALENT SCOUT

Procuring top talent was usually a problem in Winston's line of business—but not for him: he let the girls persuade themselves!

BY JACK RITCHIE

"THERE IS perhaps nothing more delightfully improving in a woman than education," I said. "It softens the voice, it teaches grace of mind, and above all, it creates that light in her eyes which a man may choose to believe is intelligence."

Mr. Williams nodded absently. He was a young man, still in his thirties, and his face was slightly flushed with what I interpreted as both expectation and uneasiness.

I sipped my bourbon. "Yes, it adds certain qualities to a woman. It completes her."

Tanya came down the carpeted stairs slowly and with poise. Her raven hair glittered diamond-like under the chandeliers.

Mr. Williams' eyes brightened.

I shook my head. "No, Mr. Williams, that is not Madeline. I beg you to be patient. You will not be disappointed."

Tanya stopped at my elbow and I turned. "Mr. Jacobsen is the gentleman standing at the piano with the martini in his hand."

She appraised him for a moment and then moved in his direction, a calm warmth in her smile.

I fingered my Phi Beta Kappa key. "Ah, yes. Madeline. A charming girl. Truly charming. She should be down any moment now."

I thought about Madeline and smiled. It had been two years ago when I had met her. Early in fall, I believe.

She had been sitting alone at a table when I entered. It was a quiet place, a small dignified bar, and I approved of that. I disliked garishness and noise intensely.

She was frightened, of course. Her eyes were quite large, but at the same time they contained a certain determination.

She looked up as I approached. "Mr. Winston?"

I bowed slightly and joined her at the table.

She regarded me with apprehensiveness—and fascina-



tion. "I hardly know how to begin or what to say."

I smiled. "Permit me to help you. Helen has explained the general nature of your problem to me. I will admit that at first I was startled by the novelty of it, but on further thought I decided that aiding you might be most enjoyable."

I signaled a waiter and ordered two daquiris. "To put it in simple terms, you are attending the university here and you are faced with the writing of a term paper."

She nodded. "Professor Wollingford's class. Economics."

I folded my hands over my walking stick. "It seems rather odd, if I may say so, that a young girl should choose such a subject for a term paper."

She blushed. "I didn't, exactly. You see, every member of the class wrote a subject that he thought might be interesting on a slip of paper and folded it. Then all of the slips were put in Professor Wollingford's hat and scrambled." Her face remained crimson. "My turn to pick was the last and I had to take what was left. I think one of the boys wrote out the subject. Maybe Jimmy Hayes or Clarence Watts. They have minds like that."

I raised an eyebrow. "But surely you could look up the facts you need at any library. And I'm sure a number of magazine articles have been written on the subject too."

She remembered her drink and took a quick swallow. "This paper has to be original research. We get graded on that. I'm supposed to interview people actually in the . . . profession."

She spoke hastily. "All I'm interested in is the economics of the thing. You understand that, don't you? I have no curiosity about anything else."

"Of course," I said.

Madelaine laughed self-consciously. "At first I didn't know where to look. I didn't even know if there were any such places in the city. I lead a very sheltered life, you know."

I smiled. "That is charming."

"I thought I'd start in the poorer sections of the city. But I was so frightened that I didn't dare interview any of those women in the first bar I went into. When Helen struck up a conversation with me, I was even relieved. She was so much better dressed than any of the others that I thought she couldn't possibly be a . . ."

She sipped her drink. "We just talked and suddenly I realized that she actually *was* a . . ."

MADELAINE TOOK an unbelieving breath. "Well, I told her my problem. At first she laughed, but after a while she snapped her fingers and said, 'You know, I think Mr. Winston might get a kick out of helping you.'"

Her face was earnest. "You understand, Mr. Winston, I am interested simply for scientific reasons. I want statistics, figures, and interviews. Nothing else."

I nodded. "I understand perfectly."

She studied me. "Aren't you afraid I might be a spy for the government or the F.B.I. or something?"

I patted her hand. "My dear girl, I trust you."

I enjoyed the next two weeks immensely. Madelaine met and interviewed all the girls. I believe that she was impressed. Yes, really impressed by the character of the girls, by the size of my place, and by the neighborhood. I'm afraid she had been expecting something dingy, something drab.

I gave her those statistics which I felt applied, but I believe that she gained most of her information by observation and talk.

I remember the night she completed her paper and brought it to me so that I could check it for authenticity.

When I finished reading, I smiled. "My dear, I believe that Professor Wollingford will be proud of you. This is a magnificent piece of work."

She remained silent, absorbed in her thoughts, and I don't believe she heard me.

I went to the sideboard and mixed two drinks. I made one of them double. "How long before graduation, Madelaine?"

"A whole year," she said gloomily. "A whole dismal miserable year."

I returned with the drinks. "I understand that you're going to be a teacher. A commendable occupation."

She regarded the term paper with hostility. "The girls earn more in one week than I could possibly make in two months as a teacher."

I studied the amber in my glass. "Teaching is a noble profession. One of the older ones in the world. It enjoys the respect of the community." I shrugged slightly. "True, it doesn't pay well, but it must be soul-satisfying to impart knowledge to the eager little minds of children."

She downed her drink with some speed. I expected her to gasp, but she didn't.

I went to the sideboard with her empty glass and made another double.

Her voice was sullen. "Charlotte got a new jaguar yesterday. It's rose."

"Ah, yes," I said. "Charlotte is doing well. She is a favorite here."

Madelaine's face was glum. "Henriette has a perfectly heavenly chinchilla."

"By the way," I said. "The girls are having a farewell party tomorrow for Elena and they asked me to invite you. Elena's getting married, you know, and moving south. I believe the man's name is Branigan."

Her eyes went wide. "You mean that Texas millionaire I met downstairs who thought I was one of the girls and tried . . .?" She emptied her whiskey glass.

When she looked at me again, there was a new light in her eyes.

She had made up her mind.

Madelaine smiled softly as she met my eyes. She had to start some time, some place. With somebody.

I was quite flattered.

Mr. Williams touched my arm and that brought me back to the present. His eyes were on the broad, winding stairway.

Madelaine was indeed a lovely creature. She walked with the grace of a princess, a queen, and her warm eyes searched the room.

"That, Mr. Williams," I said, "is Madelaine."

After they moved away together, one of the maids whispered in my ear. I nodded and went upstairs to my study. I opened the safe and removed one thousand dollars.

It was the regular amount.

I opened the door to the next room and entered.

Professor Wollingford took the pipe out of his mouth and rose. "Mr. Winston," he said. "I believe I have another one for you."

END